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Citation for published version:

Allen, A 2014, 'Finding the builders: Sources lost and extant for Edinburgh's incorporation of Mary's Chapel', *Scottish Archives*, vol. 20. <<https://www.scottishrecordsassociation.org/scottish-archives>>

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Scottish Archives

Publisher Rights Statement:

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Finding the Builders: Sources Lost and Extant for Edinburgh's Incorporation of Mary's Chapel¹

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Whilst the field of urban history has done so very much to broaden our understanding of the role of Edinburgh as a capital city in its Scottish, British and European contexts, certain aspects of the royal burgh's history are still yet to be written. Indeed our understanding of Scottish corporatism and the incorporated trade is almost wholly reliant on studies done in the Victorian period, though relatively recently attempts have been made to rectify this problem. An excellent example of the deficiencies in the historiography of Scotland's crafts and trades is that of the building trades in her capital city. This might seem rather odd, being a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with examples of fabric reaching back to the 1100s, and arguably one of the finest collections of Georgian architecture in the world. Yet despite the archaeological and architectural treasures in Edinburgh, very little attention has been paid to builders and their associated crafts.² Fortunately the manuscript and printed records survive considerably well, despite being scattered across numerous repositories, meaning that there is excellent potential for studying the building trades in the Scottish capital.

In 2014 these sources were compiled into a catalogue as part of the Mary's Chapel Project, under the auspices of the University of Edinburgh and the Edinburgh Incorporation of Mary's Chapel.³ Copies of this catalogue have since been lodged with the relevant

¹ The Incorporation of Mary's Chapel, as distinct from the Freemasons' Lodge of St Mary's Chapel, was formed in 1475 and attempted to regulate the building trades in Edinburgh until craft privileges were formally abolished in 1846. The Incorporation continued as a charitable body and still survives today. It was originally referred to as the 'Incorporation of Wrights and Masons', but from some unknown point in the seventeenth century - after their purchase of the medieval St Mary's Chapel in Niddry's Wynd - they began using a variation on the title '...of Mary's Chapel', most likely due to the increasing complexity of their membership. Included were coopers, bowers, glaziers, painters, slaters, plumbers, sievwrights, and upholsterers. Rather than focus on inequality through the primacy of the wrights and masons within the Incorporation, their commonly-held place of meeting became the focus for their corporate identity, and remained so well after Mary's Chapel was torn down in 1787 (ECA, Acc.622/3, 115) to make way for South Bridge. From 1598 the masons formed their own exclusive organization, or Lodge, to pursue their particular interests. This was in part an attempt to control stone-working labour nationally, though by the eighteenth century non-stoneworkers were given access to the social and esoteric aspects of the Lodge. For more on the Freemasons' Lodge of Mary's Chapel, and their overlapping interests with the Incorporation of Mary's Chapel, see D. Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). The sources outlined in this article focus on the Incorporation rather than the Lodge, though the officials of the Freemasons were often involved in governing the Incorporation as well.

² One notable exception is the 2006 Edinburgh PhD thesis and subsequent monograph by Dr Anthony Lewis on Edinburgh's New Town: A. Lewis, *The Builders of Edinburgh New Town 1767-1795* (Reading: Spire Books Ltd, 2014).

³ A. Allen, 'Incorporation of Mary's Chapel Project: Report & Catalogue of Sources Extant' (Unpublished, 2014). I would like to thank the Incorporation of Mary's Chapel for their generous funding of the archives scoping exercise (the Mary's Chapel Project), which produced both the unpublished catalogue and this article. I would also like to thank the anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

repositories: the Edinburgh City Archives (ECA); the National Library of Scotland (NLS); and the National Records of Scotland (NRS). Aside from the textual sources, a number of important objects held by the Trades Maiden Hospital (TMH); the National Museums of Scotland (NMS) and the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) were also included in the unpublished catalogue, such as the important eighteenth-century painting of the craftsmen of Mary's Chapel by Roderick Chalmers,⁴ one of the few contemporary images of Scottish craftsmen of any incorporation, or the horn snuff mull,⁵ which highlights the expectations of the freemen of the Incorporation for gentility and conviviality at their meetings and social gatherings.

Leaving aside the material culture, we can broadly see four main categories of surviving textual sources for the study of Mary's Chapel: minute books, administrative papers, legal papers, and financial papers. Taking each in turn we can see a sophisticated and highly developed craft bureaucracy, illuminating both the inner workings and the social standing of the Edinburgh building trades from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries. Following on from this, there is also much to be said about those sources which have not been deposited in the archives, and at present remain missing.⁶

Possibly the most useful set of records are the surviving minute and scroll minute books held by the ECA. Aside from detailing the minutia of the annual general meetings, the general quarterly meetings and, in some cases, the special committee meetings, the volumes occasionally give insight into corporate involvement in national and even international events, such as the failure of the 'African Company', and the Incorporation's subsequent receiving of a portion of the Equivalent as part of the Union settlement.⁷ Whilst the great events are indeed fascinating, it is the small matters which prove the richness of the records. The minutes detail the election of deacons and imposition of oversmen in the suburbs; they record the booking of apprentices and journeymen, of whom so many were denied the freedom restricted to masters of the Incorporation; they prescribe essays to become masters for the privileged few who broke the 'glass ceiling', with such splendid detail of the architectural and material styles of the day; and they give insight into the difficulties of the 'House' in maintaining discipline and

⁴ TMH, Roderick Chalmers, *The Edinburgh Trades* (1720). For commentary, see D. Macmillan, *Scottish Art 1460-2000* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1990), 84-5.

⁵ TMH, Snuff mull with accoutrements, presented by Deacon James Smith, 1815.

⁶ Just before publication of this article, Prof. David Stevenson kindly pointed out a particular National Register of Archives of Scotland (NRAS) accession, NRAS4305. This group of papers, dating from 1576 to 1865, remains in private hands, though an enquiry has been made about accessing these records.

⁷ ECA, SL34/1/3, Minute Book 1696-1709, 12th September 1707. This refers to the ill-fated Darien colony.

order. Here we see the inner workings of Scottish corporatism alongside much technical detail of how the capital's built heritage was constructed.

Whilst the records are exceedingly rich, their archival history and classification is slightly perplexing, due to the dispersal of different volumes to several holders over the last century. Whilst the ECA currently holds a complete run of nineteen volumes of minute books, they are actually archived in two separate and overlapping groups,⁸ as nine of the volumes were held by the NLS as 'Dep. 302' until fairly recently. This leaves us today with two different accessions for the ECA minute books: the SL34 group and the Acc.622 group. The Acc.622 minutes from 1755 to 1842,⁹ and the single volume from 1910 to 1947,¹⁰ which cover dates missing from the SL34 run, were deposited in the NLS in 1980 by the Incorporation's clerk.¹¹ This 'Dep. 302' group was later given to the ECA, who archived it as Acc.622, bringing all nineteen volumes of minutes from 1669 to 1947 into the care of the ECA.

Whilst the accession numbers of the official minutes are confusing enough, there is the additional complication of several volumes of scroll minutes included in amongst the SL34 and Acc.622 runs in the ECA.¹² Scroll minutes are rough-working, scribbled, first drafts; the actual paper written on by the clerk as the meetings happened. These scroll minutes were later transcribed neatly, and either more succinctly or in more detail, in the proper minute books. Whilst they occasionally differ slightly in wording, they appear to be messy, scribbled, minute books, and were therefore mixed in with the actual minute books sent to the NLS and ECA. Careful study of the minutes, as outlined in Table 1, shows that the official minutes were simply split up at some point before being reunited in the ECA under two different accessions. The study of the minutes therefore relies on an understanding of the two accessions being one single run of minutes from 1669 to 1947.

Tables 2 and 3 give the breakdown of scroll minutes now held by the ECA. These are equally complicated, as the SL34 run of scroll minutes overlaps with the years covered by the Acc.622 run, even though the days of meetings do not correspond. For example, if we look at the scroll entries for the month of September of 1807, the SL34 volume records a monthly committee meeting on 1st September, whilst the Acc.622 volume records meetings on the 10th

⁸ These are: ECA, SL34/1/1-14 and Acc.622/1-8 & 73.

⁹ ECA, Acc.622/1-8.

¹⁰ ECA, Acc.622/73.

¹¹ See NLS's 'Inventory, Dep. 302, Incorporation of Mary's Chapel, Edinburgh'. A paper copy of this document was given to the ECA when the records were acquired.

¹² ECA, SL34/1/8-11, for the years 1805 to 1846, are scroll minutes.

and 11th of September.¹³ Clearly these scroll minute books served different purposes. This appears to be because the SL34 scroll books, which were started in 1805, were meant for monthly committee meetings, whilst the Acc.622 scroll books were apparently used for general meetings.

Volume	Dates Covered
SL34/1/1	1669 – 1686
SL34/1/2	1686 – 1696
SL34/1/3	1696 – 1709
SL34/1/4	1709 – 1720
SL34/1/5	1720 – 1727
SL34/1/6	1727 – 1739
SL34/1/7	1740 – 1755
Acc.622/1	1755 – 1771
Acc.622/2	1771 – 1784
Acc.622/3	1784 – 1796
Acc.622/4	1796 – 1807
Acc.622/5	1808 – 1817
Acc.622/6	1817 – 1822
Acc.622/7	1822 – 1831
Acc.622/8	1831 – 1842
SL34/1/12	1842 – 1854
SL34/1/13	1854 – 1884
SL34/1/14	1884 – 1910
Acc.622/73	1910 – 1947

Table 1: ECA Minute Books, Mary's Chapel

¹³ ECA, SL34/1/8, 1805 – 1808, 1st September 1807 and ECA, Acc.622/12, 1807 – 1815, 10th and 11th September 1807.

Scroll Volume	Dates Covered
Acc.622/9	1782 – 1787
Acc.622/10	1787 – 1796
Acc.622/11	1797 – 1807
Acc.622/12	1807 – 1815
Acc.622/13	1815 – 1822
Acc.622/14	1834 – 1853
Acc.622/15	1853 – 1884

Table 2: ECA Scroll Minute
Books, Mary's Chapel

Scroll Volume	Dates Covered
SL34/1/8	1805 – 1808
SL34/1/9	1808 – 1821
SL34/1/10	1821 – 1831
SL34/1/11	1832 – 1846

Table 3: ECA Committee Meeting
Scroll Minute Books, Mary's
Chapel

Every bit as complicated and dispersed, are those papers which could be categorized as administrative in nature. Moreover, few of these are bound together into volumes, making for an even wider dispersal, though the potential data to be harvested is indeed compelling. Included in this group are documents dealing with membership of the Incorporation; attendance at meetings; and the occasional note of corporate discipline for various infractions.

As craft privileges were often contested, and therefore closely defended, one of the key functions of the developing corporate bureaucracy was to keep track of who was in – a freeman of the crafts – and who was not; an intricate system which mimicked the wider urban freedoms of ‘burgess-ship’.¹⁴ To be a burgess was to be a citizen; to be a freeman of the craft

¹⁴ To be a freeman, or master, of the Incorporation, one first had to purchase freedom of the town, or burgess-ship. For more on the relationship between the two requisite freedoms, and the problems of enforcing them, as well as the increasing complexity of the structures for governing the members of a corporate body such as Mary's Chapel, see A. Allen, ‘Conquering the Suburbs: Politics and Work in Early Modern Edinburgh’, in *Journal of Urban History*, 37:3 (2011), 428-30 and 435.

was very much like citizenship, in that unfreemen were decidedly not ‘citizens’, and therefore had no recognized status before the court of the Incorporation. There is a considerable range of membership-related papers, including letters, such as the numerous petitions to the Incorporation for admission as freemen.¹⁵ These letters, held by the NLS across various accessions, tend to follow a certain form, giving insight into a lesser-known detail of craft administration, as well as the attitudes, goals and obligations of the often-invisible class of journeyman labourers who wrote the petitions. From these petitions, much can be garnered on the education of apprentices and the substantial costs related to attaining freedom of the craft.

Many of the membership-related documents are connected with the rolls of freemen so often found in the minute books themselves.¹⁶ Loose rolls of freemen, such as the 1842 example, which includes 27 masons, 66 wrights, 2 coopers, 5 glaziers, 36 painters, 7 slaters, and 5 plumbers, might have been intended as working copies to be transcribed into the minute books later.¹⁷ This working-copy nature is demonstrated by the amendments to the list, such as the addition of ‘dead’ next to certain names, though this often translates into the official minute book versions as well, posing challenges for the historian who looks for neat and tidy demographical statistics.

Those administrative papers dealing with attendance are intriguing, as they beg questions about how unified the incorporations really were. The issues of late attendance and non-attendance, as recorded in books of ‘absent diets’, demonstrate that corporate priorities were not always wholly in line with those of individual craftsmen.¹⁸ Indeed, in some cases there is a distinct lack of commitment to the incorporation, as with the infamous Deacon Brodie, who was constantly marked as absent from committee meetings, despite his roles as both a deacon and a manager of the Widows’ Fund.¹⁹ The account book for the Widows’ Fund Scheme from 1786-1809 records his poor attendance across nineteen meetings from 4th November 1783 to 12th August 1785. Brodie is listed as absent from seventeen of these meetings, and one of the other two meetings has his name amongst the absences, but crossed out, suggesting that he decided to show up after the absences had been taken.²⁰ Whilst Deacon

¹⁵ NLS, Acc.7056, Box 1; Acc.7056, Box 2; Acc.7257; Acc.7260; and Acc.7332, Box 2.

¹⁶ ECA, SL34/1/1, Minute Book, 1669-1686. A few examples from this volume alone include the 1671 list on pages 18-19; the 1676 list on pages 57-8; and the 1684 list on pages 157-8.

¹⁷ NLS, Acc.7257. Further work on demographics will prove fruitful, as the 1672 list in the earliest available minute book gives 15 masons, 51 wrights, 7 coopers, 4 bowers, 10 glaziers, 4 painters, 8 slaters, 2 plumbers, 4 sievewrights, and 1 upholsterer, demonstrating amongst other things the rise in importance of stone as a building material by the 1800s. ECA SL34/1/1, Minute Book, 1669-1686, 26-7.

¹⁸ For examples, see NLS, MS.1991, Account book of Charles Bruce, glazier, which notes down ‘sero’ payments, and ECA, SL34/5/1-4, Books of Absent Diets, 1743–1835.

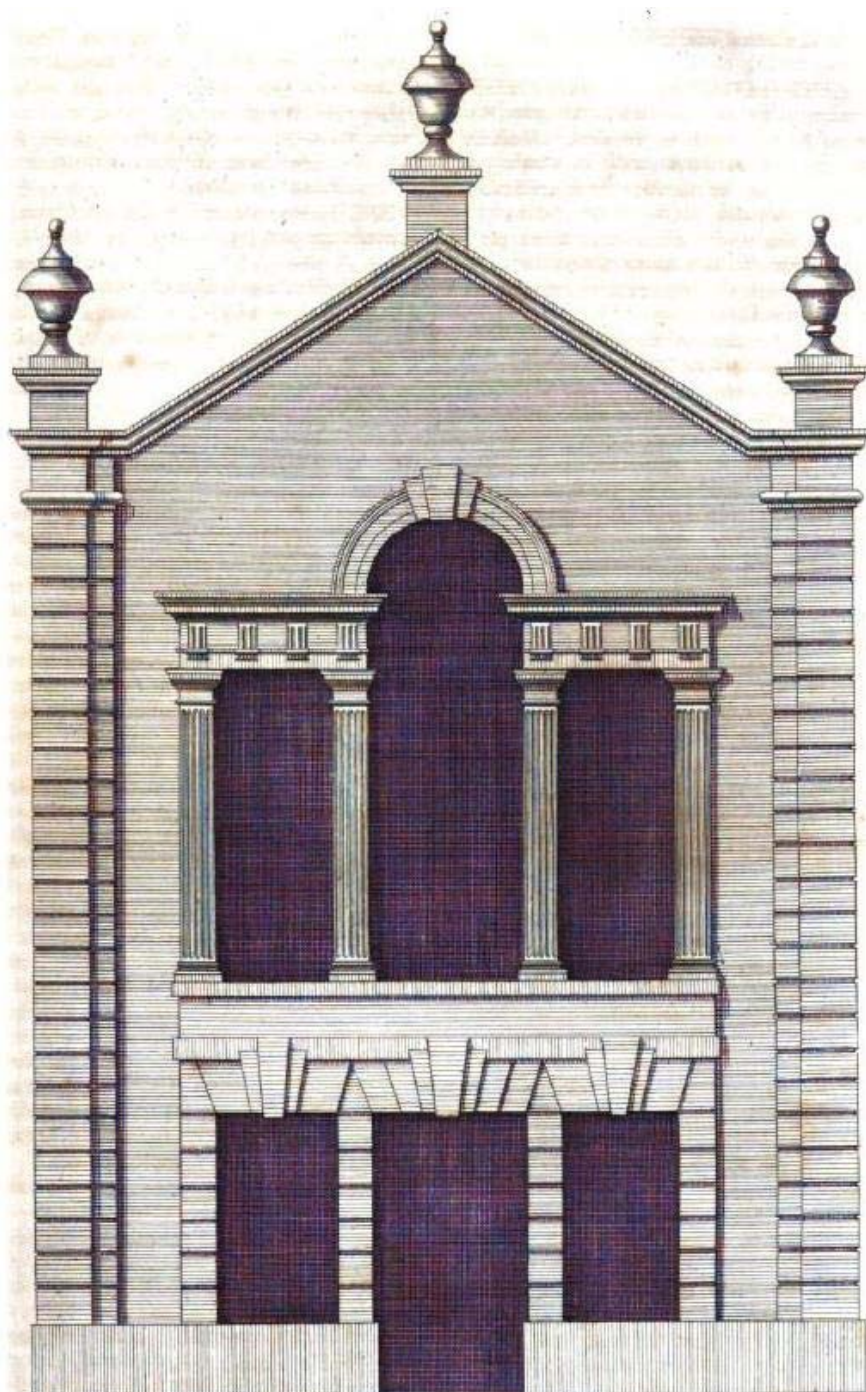
¹⁹ ECA, SL34/3/2, Minute Book, Widows’ Fund Scheme 1768–98, 12th June 1784.

²⁰ ECA, SL34/3/1, Account Book, Widows’ Fund Scheme 1786-1809.

Brodie is an extreme example, the very need of the absent diets books speaks to the challenge of keeping members unified in purpose; a challenge which most likely became more acute as corporate privileges broke down through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The last group of administrative papers also speaks to the challenges of maintaining corporate unity; these are the documents which record issues of discipline. Whilst there are numerous examples, one in particular shows how easily meetings could descend into chaos. In the NLS is a petition from one John Crawford, where he seeks the Incorporation's pardon and apologises for breaking chairs at a meeting in 1726.²¹ First he lost his temper; then he lost his privileges. Whilst other infractions noted in the records could be more verbal in nature, any affront to corporate authority was a serious business, and affected not only the Incorporation but burgh society as a whole, illustrating how the trades had come to be part of the burgh establishment with equal responsibility for maintaining order.

²¹ NLS, Acc.7056, Box 1, Bundle 2, Petition for John Crauford.



A View of St Mary's Chapel

Plate 1: 'A View of St Mary's Chapel', from W. Maitland, *The History of Edinburgh From its Foundation to the Present Time* (Edinburgh: Hamilton, Balfour and Neill, 1753), 167.

There are numerous legal papers within the various repositories, which give us a detailed picture of how complicated the privileges and entitlements of the Incorporation could be. Craft guilds have been described as ‘feudal immunities’,²² and the jurisdiction of their courts - the court of deacon and masters – was over certain occupations and materials. As this privileged status implied a barrier to the majority, the crafts by nature had much need of defending their privileges. The minute books discussed above were one of the primary places for recording their acts, statutes and laws, and later printed versions of the Incorporation’s laws were published and distributed,²³ but to rely wholly on these official sources would be to miss a wealth of information on the relentless struggle against encroaching unfreemen.²⁴

Whilst the founding charters of the privileges, or ‘seals of cause’, do survive for certain incorporated trades, it is not known what happened to the original 1475 seal of cause for the Wrights and Masons. Fortunately a copy was added to the council minutes, so we have the original text,²⁵ but the fact that such a crucial document – the very basis of the Incorporation’s existence – is missing, highlights the issue of survivability for the original sources. Despite the missing charter, several key types of legal documents are extant. Firstly, there are documents relating to corporately owned property, both in the town and farther afield. One group of nineteenth- and twentieth-century papers relates to property in Glasgow,²⁶ whilst others deal with lands and tenements within or near Niddry’s Wynd.²⁷ By far the most interesting and important is the seventeenth-century ‘Inventory of Writs’ in the NLS, which itemises thirty-eight documents which are now apparently missing. Items on the list range in date from 1575 to 1638, and include the 1601 contract which brought Mary’s

²² G. Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1938), 44.

²³ Eg: ECA, Acc.622/43, Abstracts of Laws of the United Incorporation, 1822, or the published *Laws of the United Incorporation of Mary’s Chapel, Edinburgh Instituted 15th October 1475* (Edinburgh: Colston & Co., 1893).

²⁴ The ECA, NLS, and NRS all hold sources related to suburban incorporated trades, which were a constant source of competition for the Edinburgh crafts. Canongate, as a burgh of regality, even had its own suburb of North Leith. For specific details on suburban craft records, see the unpublished catalogue held by the ECA, NLS, and NRS: A. Allen, ‘Incorporation of Mary’s Chapel Project: Report & Catalogue of Sources Extant’ (Unpublished, 2014), 34-5, 36-7, 42, 43, 46 & 48. For more on craftwork and the relationship between the capital and its ‘suburbs’ of Canongate, Leith, Potterrow and Portsburgh, see A. Allen, ‘Conquering the Suburbs: Politics and Work in Early Modern Edinburgh’, in *Journal of Urban History*, 37:3 (2011).

²⁵ The seal of cause, included in the Edinburgh council records, has subsequently been published in J. D. Marwick (ed), *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh (Edin. Recs.)*, vol. 1: 1403-1528 (Edinburgh: Scottish Burgh Records Society, 1869), 30-2. Later ratifications were also published in this series, such as that of 1633, in M. Wood (ed), *Edin. Recs.*, vol. 7: 1626-1641 (Edinburgh: Scottish Burgh Records Society, 1936), 123-5. This latter document elaborates on other ratifications betwixt 1475 and 1633.

²⁶ ECA, SL34/1/6, Minute Book, 1727-1739. Pocket on back end-board, with various papers, including one, c. 1947, dealing with Glasgow property from 1888 to 1927.

²⁷ NLS, Acc.7344, Item 1: Papers, largely legal, 1666-1760, relating to tenements, lying on the south side of the Cowgate opposite the foot of Marlin’s Wynd and adjoining the property of the Incorporation, belonging to John Wright, Slater Burgess, and to other property belonging to William and John Adam Architects, and Acc.7257, Inventory of Writs.

Chapel into the possession of the Wrights and Masons.²⁸ Previously, it was thought that the chapel came to the Incorporation in 1618,²⁹ though the Inventory suggests that the contract of this date was instead a ratification and formal handover of the *patronage* of the chapel along with a related tenement.³⁰ Apparently they received the building in 1601, but were not legal patrons of the chaplainry until 1618. It would be presumptuous to assume that all property owned by the Incorporation from 1475 to present would be visible in the surviving records, but what is there gives a fascinating view of an incorporation with a relatively diverse and dynamic property portfolio.

Some of the legal documents deal with disputes. Many of these were against unfreemen, such as the numerous papers dealing with the problem of suburban competition.³¹ Others dealt with unfreemen within the burgh boundaries, often after the involvement of the Court of Session.³² In 1787 the Incorporation went so far as to have an official blank form - a 'summons of declarator' - printed for the express purpose of pursuing unfreemen when they cropped up, and several copies survive.³³

One of the most interesting disputes is only known through a contract between a freeman wright, Gilbert Couper, and an unfree craftswoman and merchant, Mrs Sarah Dalrymple, who was to supply him with veneered and japanned work.³⁴ The contract expressly states that Couper would defend Mrs Dalrymple and her journeymen 'to ye utmost of his power against the Incorporation of the Wrights of Edinburgh', but the contract

²⁸ NLS, Acc.7257, Inventory of Writs, Number 14 (1601): 'Item ane contract maid betwix the said James Chalmer on the ane pairt and the deacones of masones and wrightis of the said burgh of Edinburghe for thame selffis and in name of the remanent masters and bretherin of thair saids craftis and of thair haill societie & yr successors on the uther pairt of the date at Edinburghe the fourtein day of februar ane thowsand sex hundreth ane yeiris quhariby the said James Sellis to the saids craftis & thair successors the said chapel callit saint marie chapel place & ground yrof and trans upon the eist & south syids thairof'.

²⁹ See H. Carr (ed.), *The Minutes of the Lodge of Edinburgh, Mary's Chapel, No. 1, 1598–1738* (London: Quatuor Coronati Lodge, No. 2076, 1962), 69.

³⁰ NLS, Acc.7257, Inventory of Writs, Number 17 (1618): 'Item ane contract maid betwix the said James Chalmer umqll Bessie rynd his spous and the said umqll Robert chalmer thair sone on the ane pairt and the deacons of the forsaid craftis for thame selffis & in name behalff forsd on the uther pairt datit at edinburghe the sexten day of aprill Jaj vjc & aughten years quhairby the said James with consent of his sd spous, and sone sauld To the saids craftis & yr successors the said chapell ground & place yrof & transs aboue written, with the back land then waist, ratiefeis the auld rightis & writtis abouewrittn, grantit to the saids craftis of the samen chapel. Sua that then the vestit onelie undisponet to the saids craftis the for tenement of land and patronage of the sd chapell'.

³¹ For example, ECA, SL34/6/2, 1743 Decreet against John Kelly, Wright at Bristoe.

³² See for examples: NLS, Acc.7056, Box 1, Bundle 1, George Gibson, bower burges of Edinburgh and boxmaster of Mary's Chapel, against George Cranston, indweller, 1616; ECA, SL34/6/1, 1791-1792 Decreet against Unfreemen. For Court of Session examples, there are several cases in the NRS: CS228/B/1/3/1, CS231/S/11/34, CS231/T/4/39, CS233/W/5/6, CS237/B/5/46, CS271/46242, CS271/49555, CS271/49839, CS271/57432, CS271/61504.

³³ NLS, Acc.7056, Box 1, Bundle 1, and Acc.7056, Box 2; ECA, Acc.622/44.

³⁴ NLS, Acc.7056, Box 1, Bundle 1, 1720 contract. Gilbert Couper and Mrs Sara Dalrymple. See also the 1717 inventory of her shop, which might suggest she was somehow connected to the Incorporation previously? NLS, Acc.7056, Box 1, Bundle 2.

somehow ended up in their possession, suggesting that Couper failed to fend off the Incorporation. Further investigation would not only illustrate the complexities of defending craft privileges, but also give valuable insight into female participation in the building trades.

Lastly, the papers of the Incorporation of Mary's Chapel include various pieces of legislation which impacted upon the trades. There are several excerpts from council minutes, such as one from 1721 relating to extraordinary deacons,³⁵ or the 1703 'Act Against Immoralities', which the convener was to add to the Incorporation's books.³⁶ Some of the papers dealt with acts of parliament. Included in the Incorporation's papers were copies of the 1784 Militia Act and the 1785 Edinburgh Improvement Act.³⁷ Through these legal papers we see a composite craft trying to negotiate the complexities of jurisdiction and privilege, while responding to the obligations of both local and national politics.

The various financial papers held in the NLS³⁸ and ECA³⁹ cover a broad period, from at least 1647⁴⁰ to 1975,⁴¹ with a decent grouping of papers for all four centuries. These can broadly be categorized into account papers and Widows' Fund papers. The highly varied accompts (accounts), give details of charge and discharge, and are both collected into bound volumes or held separately as individual papers, creating a vast quantity of finance-related materials. Add to these the specific Widows' Fund accounts and papers, and the economic historian faces both challenge and opportunity in reconstructing the economic standing of the building trades in Scotland's capital.

The bound accounts volumes come in several forms, such as regular account books from 1749 to 1838,⁴² in which the 'boxmaster', and later, the 'treasurer', would record the various items of charge and discharge.⁴³ Related to these are the nineteenth-century printed 'Abstracts of Accounts',⁴⁴ apparently intended for distribution to freemen. There are bound

³⁵ NLS, Acc.7056, Box 2, Extract of Town Council Minutes, 1721.

³⁶ NLS, Acc.7056, Box 2, 1703 Act of Council.

³⁷ ECA, Acc.622/44.

³⁸ NLS, Acc.7056, Acc.7257, Acc.7260, Acc.7332, Acc.7344, Acc.7494, Acc.8351 & Acc.8617.

³⁹ ECA, SL34/2/1-4; SL34/3/1-5; Acc.622/16-42, 44, 48-50, 55-69, 78 & 79.

⁴⁰ Apparently, the earliest specifically-financial papers are in NLS, Acc.7332, Box 2, Item 1, 'Boxmaster's discharged accounts, etc 1647-65, 1668', which alone accounts for eighty separate items. All NLS accessions and most ECA accessions hold financial papers or accounts of some description.

⁴¹ ECA, Acc.622/20-27 & 69, Treasurer's Cash Books 1769-1975. For the twentieth century, see also, Acc.622/55-60, Formal Accounts, 1846-1960.

⁴² ECA, SL34/2/1-4, Account Books, 1749-1838.

⁴³ As an example, the first volume includes a record on page 98 of the upsett payment in 1763 for William Brodie, wright - the notorious Deacon Brodie - who paid £8 19s 11½d. ECA, SL34/2/1, Account Book 1749-1785.

⁴⁴ ECA, Acc.622/48, 61-64; SL34/3/5, Minute Book, 1882-1897, attached to page 63; NLS, Acc.7056, Box 1, Bundle 1; and Acc.7056, Box 2.

‘cash books’,⁴⁵ from the eighteenth-century into the later twentieth, as well as bound volumes of correspondence facsimiles from 1900 to 1936.⁴⁶ Lastly, there are various roll books of annuitants,⁴⁷ which record information on the crucial issue of pensions, and rental ledgers,⁴⁸ giving valuable information on the continued roll of the Incorporation as landlord and rentier. These latter volumes supplement the scattered references to corporately-owned property in the earlier minutes, accounts and papers, allowing for a more complete view of corporate land-ownership over time.

More dispersed are the various loose papers from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, which are scattered throughout the NLS and ECA collections. Examples of these range from nineteenth-century letters from annuitants,⁴⁹ to tradesmen’s bills for work done for the Incorporation, such as the 1796 cooper’s bill for a puncheon made for ‘the tavern’.⁵⁰ One intriguing example gives an itemized list of food and drink bought for a dinner in 1726, including: beef, goose, fowls, mutton, three chopins of sherry, three chopins of brandy, and twenty-seven quarts of ale at £68 13s 6d.⁵¹ Whilst it might be reasonably assumed that some of the loose items were transcribed into the bound volumes, there is still a vast amount of loose material, posing a serious challenge to any systematic treatment of the political economy of the building trades’ Incorporation.

The second more-specific group of accounts is that of the Widows’ Fund Scheme. Begun by an act of the Incorporation in 1768,⁵² the scheme imposed order on the previous system of charity for the Incorporation’s widows; one which began to crystallize with the change from religious fraternity, focused on an altar, to an exclusive economic body, intent on protecting privilege and providing security.⁵³ Unfortunately, little work has been done on the Widows’ Fund schemes in Scotland, though the Mary’s Chapel records would provide considerable data.

⁴⁵ ECA, Acc.622/20-27 & 69, Treasurer’s Cash Books 1769-1975.

⁴⁶ ECA, Acc.622/28-30, Treasurer’s Out-Letter Books, 1900-36.

⁴⁷ ECA, Acc.622/35-42, Annuitants’ Roll Books (Pensions).

⁴⁸ ECA, Acc.622/31, Rental Book, 1783-7; Acc.622/78, Rent Ledger, 1874-1929; Acc.622/79, Fenduty Ledger, 1874-1929.

⁴⁹ ECA, Acc.622/50, Letters of annuitants, 1847-71.

⁵⁰ NLS, Acc.7056, Box 1, Bundle 2, Cooper’s bill for a puncheon for ‘the tavern’, 1796. The tavern would appear to be the one owned by the Incorporation after the rebuilding of their convening house, though this clearly requires further investigation. See ECA, Acc.622/11, Scroll Minute Book, 1797-1807, f3, where on 6th February 1797 one Mr Reid is described as ‘the Tenant in the Tavern’.

⁵¹ NLS, MS.2212, f34.

⁵² ECA, SL34/3/2, Widows’ Fund Minute Book, 1768-98. Pages 19-22 contain a ‘Copy of the Deed of Accession & Obligation’, which records that the Widows’ Fund Scheme began by act of the Incorporation dated 8 March 1768. See also, ECA, Acc.622/44, Copy, act of Incorporation instituting a Widows’ Scheme.

⁵³ For more on this interpretation of corporate change, see R. Lamond, ‘The Scottish Craft Gild as a Religious Fraternity’, in *The Scottish Historical Review*, 16:63 (1919), 191-211.

The material in the ECA includes a single bound account book,⁵⁴ and four bound volumes of minutes related to meetings of the committee responsible for overseeing the Widows' Fund.⁵⁵ Further material includes four bound volumes of scroll minutes for Widows' Scheme meetings from 1785 to 1880;⁵⁶ a ledger, noting individual quarterly contributions from 1768 to 1786;⁵⁷ two rate books, covering the periods 1768 to 1798⁵⁸ and 1820 to 1848;⁵⁹ and a cash book for the period 1820 to 1897.⁶⁰ The material in the NLS is again more dispersed, and ranges from the numerous loose petitions from widows before the establishment of the Scheme,⁶¹ to payment receipts;⁶² from diverse Widows' Fund papers,⁶³ to reports⁶⁴ and minutes⁶⁵ of the committees.

One last facet of the financial papers relating to the Incorporation of Mary's Chapel are those documents which inform us of the political economies of individual members, which could tell us so much about the lives and businesses of the Incorporation's members. To give but a few examples, there are numerous bills for work carried out, such as the bill for £12 6s for cleaning snow from a roof in the New Assembly Close two different times, and for mending part of the same roof in 1795-6,⁶⁶ or the wrights' and masons' bills for building at Yester in 1714-15.⁶⁷ Possibly more useful, is the testamentary evidence available for those craftsmen or craftsmen's widows who had a last will and testament registered. Numerous examples survive in the NRS, allowing for a sampling of builders' estates from 1513 to 1925.

Whilst not all members of the Incorporation have surviving testaments, careful quantitative analysis of the surviving sample could prove quite interesting. For example, Mause Udward, sometime spouse to James Hunter, 'glassinwright and merchant', left a testament in 1587 with an inventory worth £1,356 13s 4d, and debts owed to her of £4,096. As her own debts to others amounted to £1,950, we can see that James Hunter's widow was

⁵⁴ ECA, SL34/3/1, Widows' Fund Scheme Account Book, 1786-1809.

⁵⁵ ECA, SL34/3/2-5, Widows' Fund Scheme Minute Books, 1768-1897.

⁵⁶ ECA, Acc.622/16-19, Widows' Scheme Scroll Minutes, 1785-1880.

⁵⁷ ECA, Acc.622/32, Mary's Chapel Widows' Scheme Ledger, 1768-86.

⁵⁸ ECA, Acc.622/33, Widows' Scheme Annual Rates Book, 1768-98.

⁵⁹ ECA, Acc.622/34, New Widows' Scheme, Rate Book, 1820-48.

⁶⁰ ECA, Acc.622/68, Widows' Fund Cash Book, 1820-97.

⁶¹ For a few random examples, 1695: NLS Acc.7056, Box 1, Bundle 1; or 1705-45: NLS Acc.7056, Box 1, Bundle 2.

⁶² For various 1806 annuity examples: NLS, Acc.7260. For examples of other receipts: NLS, Acc.8351/8, Widows' receipts, 1783, or Acc.7257.

⁶³ NLS, Acc.7056, Box 2, Widows' Fund papers, 1782-1804; Acc.7260, Sentiments respecting the Widows' Scheme, c.1782?; Acc.7257.

⁶⁴ NLS, Acc.7257 and Acc.7056, Box 2.

⁶⁵ NLS, Acc.7344/4(i), Minute, 1790, re Incorporation Widows' Scheme.

⁶⁶ NLS, Acc.7056, Box 2, 1795-6 Bill of Jo Ritchie, slater.

⁶⁷ NLS, GB233, MS.14656, x, f191.

worth £3,502 13s 4d, which was a considerable sum.⁶⁸ Aside from demonstrating the information on assets and debts which could be gleaned from the testaments, we also see here a fascinating window into a craftsman's life. Clearly he moved from 'rude mechanic' to the merchant elite, and one wonders if his wife carried on the business after his death. Just how involved was Mause in the running of her husband's business, both before and after his death? Testamentary evidence would clearly enhance our understanding of the final stages of both the craft career and the involvement of the wider family unit. Whilst some stages, such as apprenticeship, would be better informed by other sources, the potential higher levels of the career ladder, such as guildry or even council involvement, might be brought back to life by an understanding of debts and assets at the time of demise. Unfortunately, testamentary coverage of the Incorporation and their widows is not as uniform as we would like.

Despite the richness of the archival material in the ECA, NLS, and NRS, it is still quite striking how late the majority of the surviving records are, with a clear 1670 to 1900 bias. This poses some serious challenges for the historian of the Incorporation of Mary's Chapel, as it is well documented that the trades were granted their seal of cause in 1475.⁶⁹ Clearly there are missing documents. Indeed, the Edinburgh Incorporation of Hammermen, which was not incorporated until the grant of their seal of cause in 1483, has extant minute books from 1494 into the twentieth century.⁷⁰ This begs certain questions, such as when did the Wrights and Masons first employ the services of a scribe to make an official record of their affairs; what exactly was recorded; and – crucially – to where did these records go? Considering that the extant records are dispersed across at least three major repositories, it is not implausible that further records also survive, waiting to be rediscovered.

Whilst the question about where the missing records are might never be answered, all is not lost in terms of what the records contained. There is a source which survives in the ECA which could justifiably be deemed as equally important to the extant minute books; perhaps even more important. This particularly tantalizing source for the early history of the building trades makes it unmistakably clear that the Wrights and Masons were every bit as bureaucratic and record-conscious as the other incorporated trades, fully employing the record-keeping services of a scribe. This is a thinly-bound typescript by the then PhD student at the University of St Andrews, Anna Jean Mill.⁷¹ In what is effectively a calendar of papers

⁶⁸ NRS, CC8/8/16, Udward, Mause, 1587.

⁶⁹ *Edin. Recs.*, vol. 1: 1403-1528, 30-2.

⁷⁰ ECA, ED008/1, Incorporation of Hammermen of Edinburgh Minute Books 1494-1937.

⁷¹ ECA, SL12/236, A. J. Mill, 'Rough Inventory of Records Belonging to the Wrights and Masons of Edinburgh' (1923). Dr Mill's PhD thesis on medieval Scottish drama was later published as *Mediaeval Plays in Scotland* (London: W. Blackwood & Sons Ltd, 1924).

held by the Incorporation of Mary's Chapel, Mill set out in two sections a list of over fifty items from 1475 to 1651. It would appear that they are all now missing.

Mill's typescript, which includes the letter which she sent to the Incorporation apologising for the rushed-nature of her typescript, is astonishingly detailed, giving excellent insight into the now-missing records. According to the surviving ECA minute book for 1910 to 1947, Mill wrote to the Incorporation's clerk⁷² in 1922 asking for access to their papers, in hopes of finding further details about the trades' involvement in the street pageants and processions prior to the Reformation.⁷³

The typescript is divided into two sections. In section 'A', there is a detailed list of 'charters and loose documents', beginning with the 1475 seal of cause and various confirmations from James IV, James V and from the Archbishop of St Andrews.⁷⁴ One 'alienation of annual rent' of 1508 gives the position of the crafts' altar of Saints John the Baptist and Evangelist as being on the north-hand side of St Giles, and immediately after the altar of 'St Coberti'.⁷⁵ Other items include a council document about importing timber, or a license under the Great Seal in regards to the 1555 proscription of deacons.⁷⁶ Many of the items listed deal with the actual structure and chaplainry of Mary's Chapel, detailing how the property moved from patron to patron before coming into the full possession of the Wrights and Masons.⁷⁷ Intriguingly, the chaplainry continued after the Reformation, giving excellent insight into the transition from chapel to convening hall; a process which happened elsewhere, but is not yet fully understood.⁷⁸

Section 'B', which contains 'continuous records', is even more important, as it records five 'minute books' for the years 1554 to 1583, proving that there were earlier volumes. Whilst these are undoubtedly minute books, due to their content, the descriptions of their

⁷² Mr R. K. Blair Esq., W. S., of 19 Ainslie Place. Blair appears to have been from a family firm, as previous clerks shared his surname.

⁷³ ECA, Acc.622/73, Minute Book, 1910-47, 183.

⁷⁴ ECA, SL12/236, Mill, 'Rough Inventory', 1-5.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1, where Mill quotes the Latin: 'ex parte boreali et immediate post altare sancti coberti versus boream eiusdem ecclesie.' I'm grateful to Dr Aaron Pelttari for his assistance with the Latin, which I paraphrase above. 'St Coberti' would appear to refer to St Hubert, whose altar was just south of that of Saints John the Baptist and Evangelist. See the excellent map of the numerous altars in St Giles in George Hay, 'The Late Medieval Development of the High Kirk of St Giles, Edinburgh', in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 107 (1975-6), 255, or the text of the original grant of the altar in *Edin. Recs.*, vol. 1: 1403-1528, 30-2.

⁷⁶ ECA, SL12/236, Mill, 'Rough Inventory', 5.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 9. Ownership of Mary's Chapel seems to have come to the Wrights and Masons in stages. Whilst Mill's Inventory suggests that Mary's Chapel was purchased in 1618 for '1060 marks', the NLS Inventory of Writs makes clear that the building itself had already been purchased in 1601, but that an associated tenement and the right of patronage of the chaplainry were purchased in 1618. NLS, Acc. 7257, Inventory of Writs, Numbers 14 and 17. See footnotes 28 and 30 above for the text.

⁷⁸ Other trades had post-Reformation chaplains, such as the Skinners. *Edin. Recs.*, vol. 6: 1604-1626 (Edinburgh: Scottish Burgh Records Society, 1931), 19.

lengths are slightly perplexing, as the first four were between 6 and 16 folios, while the fifth was noted as including ‘rough jottings’.⁷⁹ Were these full minute books, or perhaps the scroll minutes used to record the information which would go into the official minutes?

Whatever the nature of the minutes, these documents are now missing, though thanks to the keen interest in crafts of Anna Mill, the typescript she left is full of details which she gleaned from the minutes. Whilst some items are paraphrased, such as the single reference to the Incorporation meeting on St Leonard’s Hill,⁸⁰ or several of the entries for 1555 regarding deacons and the raising of a tax, or ‘extent’ for the Queen,⁸¹ others are apparently quotations from the minutes, such as the c.1555 essay, ‘ane pale dressour with ane squair bak & ane heid’.⁸² Items covered include boxmasters’ accounts;⁸³ upset payments and banquets for newly-admitted masters;⁸⁴ lists of craftsmen, including ‘roughlayers’⁸⁵ and at least one cowan;⁸⁶ scribes and officers;⁸⁷ the purchase of fabrics for making a banner;⁸⁸ and numerous examples of disobedience to the deacons.⁸⁹ Indeed, the range of content of Mill’s typescript is truly spectacular, though her cover letter and the note on the title page make it clear that in her haste to finish the list her text had not been rechecked against the original manuscripts, which simply urges the reader to the usual caution in approaching any transcription.

Perhaps the most surprising aspects of the missing minutes are the numerous references throughout the first few volumes to the Incorporation meeting in ‘St John’s Chapel’. There is apparently a chimney for the chapel,⁹⁰ with a rented-out cellar,⁹¹ and a tenant living above it: ‘gilliam ye franche payntir quha duells abone ye chapell’.⁹² Are these entries referring to the aisle in which their altar stood as ‘chapel’, and to the upper revestory as the painters ‘house’? The physical space and fabric of the pre-1829 north transept of St

⁷⁹ ECA, SL12/236, Mill, ‘Rough Inventory’, 14-22.

⁸⁰ 3rd June 1554. Ibid., 15.

⁸¹ This contribution, which followed the notorious incident when deacons were abolished in Scotland, was part of a wider sum of £1000 which the crafts had to pay Mary de Guise ‘for ye halding of ws in till our libertie’. Ibid., 16.

⁸² The essay is not dated, but comes just before an entry of 13th May 1555. Ibid., 15.

⁸³ For example, Ibid., 20-2.

⁸⁴ For example, 20th February 1574-5. Ibid., 18.

⁸⁵ 31st July 1568. Ibid., 17.

⁸⁶ 6th August 1568, William Henderson. Whilst he was not called a ‘cowan’, it is implied by his work on ‘wallis dykis and symple houses with clay sand and lyme allanirlie’. Ibid., 17.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 19 & 21.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 20. This was for the 1579 entry of James VI. For further details of the ceremony, see G. Guidicini, ‘Municipal Perspective, Royal Expectations, and the Use of Public Space: The Case of the West Port, Edinburgh, 1503-1633’, in *Architectural Heritage*, 22 (2011), 38, 43-4, 47 and 51.

⁸⁹ ECA, SL12/236, Mill, ‘Rough Inventory’, 18-20.

⁹⁰ ‘8th Aug. 1559. Robert Fender undertakes to “compleit ye chymnay of ye chapell” for £5.’ Ibid., 17.

⁹¹ ‘ye cellar vnder ye chapell’ Ibid., 15.

⁹² She goes on to refer to it as a ‘house’, for which rent was paid each term. Ibid., 17.

Giles High Kirk would seem to fit the descriptions,⁹³ but there were also at least two St John's Chapels near Edinburgh according to the Canmore database of the RCAHMS. Further research on the tantalizing details in the Mill typescript might turn up some interesting information on where the trades met prior to purchasing Mary's Chapel.

What is most clear from the rich collections of archival material is just how great the need is for a full study of the Edinburgh Incorporation of Mary's Chapel. Indeed, it is remarkable that such a study has not already been done, considering the prominence of the architectural heritage in such an important European capital and World Heritage Site. The sources for the Incorporation are rich and varied, speaking to so many different facets of the socio-economic, political and cultural experiences of a crucial group of craftsmen – the very builders of the Scottish capital. As they plied their trades, providing such basic needs as shelter and storage, or creature comforts with the latest fashions in furniture and furnishings, this diverse group of craftsmen found ways not only to negotiate markets and municipal politics, but to do so corporately, reflecting in privileged microcosm the wider ideal of the 'common well'. How integrated they were into their own Incorporation - or into the communities of the King's lieges who purchased their skills, labour and goods - is not always clear, though the materials to explore this are indeed available. With such rich resources, there remains much to be said about this crucial Edinburgh institution, though the scattered nature of the records across so many repositories does indeed pose certain challenges.

⁹³ For more on the craft altars in St Giles, including St John's Aisle in the north transept, see G. Hay, 'The Late Medieval Development of the High Kirk of St Giles, Edinburgh', in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 107 (1975-6), 249, 254-5, and D. Laing, *Registrum Cartarum Ecclesie Sancti Egidii de Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1859), 32 and plate 7.